'"Of all these bounds, even from this line to this": Shakespeare and his World testing us to our very Limits'

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Shakespeare and his World testing us to our very limits

> Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
> With shadowy forests and with champaigns riched,
> With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
> We make thee lady. To thine and Albany’s issue
> Be this perpetual. (*King Lear* I.i.61-5)[1]

One of the most familiar *loci* in the Shakespearean canon, Lear’s fractionalisation and gifting of his kingdom to his variously unruly daughters offers a key point of entry into a discussion played out vigorously in the cultural debates of early (and late) modernity: the imperatives of bounds, limits, edges in establishing the necessary conditions of human existence.

Paradoxically, but in a manner all too familiar to early modern and more recent audiences, Shakespeare’s beleaguered patriarch seeks to assert his own authority by unpicking ancient Britain’s political integrity. This ill-fated bid for his own solace is strategically supplemented by the knowledge that the king’s own mental integrity has already begun to unravel even before Shakespeare’s dramatic narrative is set in motion: ‘’Tis the infirmity of his age, yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself’ (*King Lear* I.ii.288-9). In this way, we are thrust into a readily identifiable environment characterised by concerns with political polarisation, cultural fragmentation, porous frontiers, threatened boundaries. Indeed, within a short space of time, Lear’s spectacular acts of misgovernment unleash a whole host of inexorable powers throughout a tragic universe extraordinarily receptive to diverse sources of chaos and malevolence.

More generally, however, it soon becomes apparent that Shakespeare and his contemporaries returned seemingly compulsively to this anxiety concerning the configuration

or, rather, troubled re-configuration of bodies politic. Such enquiries clearly had the potential to excite frictional energies in audience choices between sympathy and judgement and to probe the often thorny dilemmas of life lived in society. This persistent querying of the nature of political integrity might be conducted under a host of different terms - geographical, historical, social, legal, racial, somatic, linguistic, soteriological – and made its presence felt in a wide range of genres. It is clearly in evidence in the antecedents to Shakespeare's tragedy, for example, *Gorboduc* and *King Leir*. Indeed, the pressing of questions regarding political justice, moral probity and the bounds of state jurisdictions is frequently associated with the artistic undertaking of tragedy itself, from the practice of ancients to notable early modern examples of the genre in the shape of *Macbeth*, *The Duchess of Malfi* or *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Yet such investigations were not solely the preserve of tragedy. Comedies, such as *As You Like It*, as well more generically hybrid dramatic narratives (such as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, Cary's *Mariam* or Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent*) engaged at length with such preoccupations, as did the chronicle writing of Foxe and Ralegh, the philosophical imaginings of Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and the epic visions of Spenser and Milton, to name but a few.[2] If such a generation of writers returned with remarkable regularity to questions of the demarcation and containment of authority and jurisdictions, it was all too often in order to scrutinise mythologies of collective belonging and to interrogate the ethics of governance.

Circumscribing the Nation

Confining attention for the moment to the Shakespearean corpus, an analogous crisis of political decision-making and trajectory to that already identified in *King Lear* may be witnessed throughout the earlier *1 Henry IV*. Here, the eager scavenging of aggrieved conspirators brings forth proposed solutions, once again, in terms of political fragmentation,

disengagement, division. At the mid-point in the intrigue, Mortimer reassures the assembled company of rebels:

> The Archdeacon hath divided it
> Into three limits very equally:
> England, from Trent and Severn hitherto,
> By south and east is to my part assigned;
> All westward, Wales beyond the Severn shore,
> And all the fertile land within that bound,
> To Owen Glendower; and, dear coz, to you
> The remnant northward, lying off from Trent; (*1 Henry IV* III.i.70-7)

Here, in the midst of yet another scrum-down for the division of the spoils, audience attentions are directed powerfully to the creative unpiecing of a failing political state. We bear witness to the dynamic manner in which the human appetite to covet may unframe any system of checks and balances which conventionally should harness the community of the nation. In this instance, Henry's seizing of the crown from Richard II has radically problematised any assertion of political authority in a realm characterised by competing grievances and contested schemes of social priority. Indeed, as we are drawn into such volatile political arenas radically unsettling cultural, legal, familial, nay often fundmental human expectations of conduct, our own understandings of the remorselessly fractious, flux-ridden environments in which we make our own everyday lives and selves are inevitably renewed and enriched.

The cultural theorist Zygmunt Baumann has persuasively located contemporary conditions of existence in the '"liquid" phase of modernity'

> that is, into a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behaviour) can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long.[3]

Nonetheless, in our unceasing fascination with the modern, we risk losing sight of the fact that the *early* modern age (notably its theatre in London's Liberties) remained intimately acquainted with conditions of existence in which limits, boundaries, confines were being tested, weakened, exceeded, collapsed. Amidst the extravagance of the antics perpetrated by Olivia's retainers in *Twelfth Night*, for example, Maria inevitably gives pause for thought to audiences both on- and off-stage, arguing, 'Ay, but you must confine yourself within the modest limits of order' (I.iii.7-8). Elsewhere, we are welcomed into the more desperately trauma-ridden world of *Antony and Cleopatra* with the news that 'this dotage of our general's/O'erflows the measure' (I.i.1-2). Inevitably, this ongoing cultural (and textual) investment in scrutinising the bounds of human conduct and political exchange could not be contained within the *wooden O* of the London playhouses. Indeed, the virulent antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson for one remained acutely conscious of this human drive to occlude distinctions, to *o'erflow the measure*: 'we which haue both sense, reason, wit, and vnderstanding, are euer ouerlashing, passing our boundes, going beyond our limites, neuer keeping our selues within compasse'.[4] Such meditations on excess which emerge with remarkable frequency in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries may also engage tightly with rather more perennial anxieties in which limits, bounds, frontiers all too often become sites of urgent danger and media theatre as well as communicating pressing anxieties about our own apparent undefendability.

As we have seen, at the opening of *King Lear* the dimensions of the kingdom are fractured and transposed by the king's 'darker purpose' to the diminutive scale of a royal map and a very particular royal mind: 'Of all these bounds, even from this line to this' (I.i.34). In

this vision, the *champaigns riched, plenteous rivers* and *wide-skirted meads* are thus emptied of their residents with the mock-ritual of the love test which the ageing king confects.[5] In this extravagantly-charged evocation of political lordship or rite of self-dispossession, there are no subjects, no ranks or political estates to become resisting readers of the will of a Lear or a Goneril. Subsequently offered by her father a portion 'No less in space, validity and pleasure' (I.i.70), Cordelia notably remains unwilling to revise her station with 'that glib and oily art' (I.i.212) of speech and so finds herself at the outset trapped within impoverishing human relations and critically marginalised forms of agency. The debilitated and debilitating monarch dismembers his realm and his family, but unknowingly dissolves his own claim to sovereignty by embracing a *descending* theory of social mobility. France initially questions who could have acted in a manner 'so monstrous' as to sever the royal ties of blood and so unsolder the British nation (I.i.216). More generally, Lear continues to re-affirm his status as patron and *pater patriae,* but ultimately he has squandered his political birthright and the nation's integrity with stagings of 'idle' or 'idol ceremony' (*Henry V* IV.i.217). If such actions might seem to respond all too closely to cycles of political experience past and present, Shakespeare's contemporary, the essayist Sir William Cornwallis, certainly thought so at the turn of the Tudor century. He declared in his *Essayes* (1600-1), 'there is such a misterie in Nature, as natures passing beyonde their allotted limits, worke nothing but confusion, and not euen their owne intendements can they bring to perfection'.[6]

Political Leadership and Powers of Restraint

In Europe, the early modern court's understandings of itself, its *habitus*, its precisely calibrated spaces of access and influence, had been encoded in influential publications, such as Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528. English translation 1561), della Casa's *Galateo* (1558. English translation 1576), and Guazzo's *La Civil Conversazione* (1574. English

translation 1581). Here, readers were reminded that the geographical or architectural dimensions of courtly life, of chambers and antechambers, might be wholly subordinate in the eyes of the time to the systematisation of ethical obligations incumbent upon the political elite. When Sir Thomas Hoby published his translation of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* in 1561, Elizabethans were now asked in their native language to attend to the fact that, 'the prince [ought] not only to be good, but also to make others good, like the Carpenters square, that is not only straight and just it self, but also maketh straight & just whatsoever it is occupied about'.[7] Nonetheless, instead of encountering such political rectitude, again and again in the company of early modern dramatists (irrespective of the genre) we are thrust into crisis-stricken worlds groaning under the strain of premature inheritance, lapsed obligation and morally unremarkable governance.

Whether we turn to the dishing out of the family silver in Lear's Ancient Britain or to the febrile conspiracies in the British nations at the turn of fifteenth century, we are confronted with a society painfully acknowledging its own incompleteness and frantically attending to the thrilling potential to self-destruct. 'Let me have war', contends the Volscian servingman in the later *Coriolanus*, 'It exceeds peace as far as day does night' (IV.v.221-2). Elsewhere, with fine irony for audiences both on- and off-stage, the mock-king Claudius in *Hamlet* insists 'Revenge should have no bounds' (IV.iv.127). In the disorders of such dramatic worlds, the violence wrought on habits of thought, word and deed by the political elite enables all kinds of unlikely, sometimes unholy, alliances to be forged and powers to be levied. We might think of a Volscian invading multitude with the Roman Coriolanus at its head:

> A fearful army, led by Caius Martius,
> Associated with Aufidius, rages
> Upon our territories and have already

O'erborne their way […] (*Coriolanus* IV.vi.75-8).

Elsewhere, there is a melancholic, solitary Danish prince who is yet 'loved of the distracted multitude' (*Hamlet* III.vi.4). And in the tragedy considered at the opening of this discusson, there is an abandoned British princess, 'Unfriended, new-adopted to [parental] hate' (*King Lear* I.i.189), arriving with a foreign, French army to redeem the island kingdom. The failure to observe convention or proprieties in the changeful political landscapes of ancient Rome, ancient Britain or fifteenth-century England can trigger radically unexpected outcomes and casualties. Indeed, as we move deeper into Henry VI's England, Coriolanus' Rome or Lear's Britain, the drive to violate limits becomes the very motor of social organization: physical, verbal, psychological, institutional violence is no longer interruptive, but a commonplace and viable social practice. Moreover, such practices were being placed under the microscope in the theatres for the unpredictable deliberations of a large and sometimes unwieldy mass of spectators. Drawing attention to the dangers inherent in such a situation in his *Vertues common-wealth* (1603), the choleric Henry Crosse railed that 'a Play[house] is like a sincke in a Towne, wherevnto all the filth doth runne: or a byle in the body, that draweth all the ill humours vnto it'. However, he may have struck an unexpectedly just note in later submitting, 'what more fitter occasion to summon all the discontented people together, then Playes?'.[8]

Given the acute nature of such cultural anxieties, the leading natural philosopher of the Elizabethan *fin-de-siècle*, Francis Bacon, submitted in his *Essayes* that 'it is not good to look too long upon these turning wheels of vicissitude, lest we become giddy'.[9] Striking a characteristically more sombre note in his *History of the World* (1614), Walter Ralegh significantly gravitated in an account entitled 'Of our base and fraile bodies' to a translation of Marius Victor, affirming that 'Diseases, famine, enemies, in us no change have wrought,/What erst we were, we are; still in the same snare caught'.[10] Later, during the stress-ridden years of

the 1640s, Thomas Browne would conclude presciently in his *Religio Medici* (1643) that 'the glory of one state depends upon the ruin of another'.[11] The repeated violation of customary limits and expectations was such that it could be difficult to focus on any other other questions apart from those of political and human inadequacy, decay, absence, loss. Moreover, it seemed that there might be every reason for alarm concerning even the bounds of the British nations themselves, if James Howell's *A German diet, or, The ballance of Europe* (1653) stood as a trustworthy guide. Here, in the midst of the oratorical cut-and-thrust of Howell's supposed 'German diet', one noble speaker proposes, 'Now, touching the Inhabitants of *Great Britain* 'tis well known, as the sea tumbleth perpetually about the Countrey, so their braines do fluctuat in their noddles, which makes them so variable and unsteady' – the only consolation to be derived from such a wretched state of affairs, it appeared, was that 'herein [the British] are little inferior to their next transmarin neighbours the *French*'.[12]

If the discourse which so often has currency in more contemporary debates around the globe is that of necessary re-alignment, regaining integrity, fulfilling destiny, making the nation great again, greatness, it should be remembered, was also a theme of some import as the Tudor century gave way to that of the Stuarts. James VI left Edinburgh on the demise of Elizabeth, instructing his Scottish subjects to embrace the English 'as thair deirest bretherein and freindis, and the inhabitants of baith his realmes to obliterat and remove out of thair myndis all and quhatsumever quarrellis […] with ane universall unanimitie of hartis'.[13] At the opening of the new reign in 1603, a silver accession medal was struck, hailing in a Latin inscription, 'James I, Emperor of the whole island of Britain and King of France and Ireland'.[14] In the following year a coronation medal celebrated 'James I, Caesar Augustus of Britain'.[15] In the event, the parliamentary communities of neither England nor Scotland would show themselves responsive to Stuart wishes to enlarge body politic and to forge an *Empire of Great Britain*. Indeed, striking a timely note in his correspondence of the time, Francis Bacon submitted that

the new king 'hastneth to a mixture of both Kingdoms, and Nations, faster perhaps then pollicie will beare'.[16]

Binding and Loosening the Commonwealth

Across the early modern continent, architectural theorists such as Alberti and Brunelleschi, responding to the enduring veneration in antiquity for the cultural activity held within the bounds of the *polis* or *civitas*, promoted the symbolic economy of the city as the early modern state writ small. Strikingly in the London playhouses, audiences were all too often greeted by stark inversions of this ideal of the city-state in the shape of morally collapsed, socially volatile, crime-infested urban scapes, such as those found in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589-90), Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610) or Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1607). Indeed, in the latter we are plunged into 'This man-deuouring Cittie' where 'Men may haue Cormorant wishes'.[17]

In 1617, the Venetian Envoy, Orazio Busino, remained in no doubt that the Jacobean capital was a profoundly dangerous locality in which to render oneself conspicuous to either eye or ear, most particularly if you could not claim relation or affiliation with its residents:

> Foreigners are ill regarded not to say detested in London, so sensible people dress in the English fashion […] Some of our party saw a wicked woman in a rage with an individual supposed to belong to the Spanish embassy. She urged the crowd to mob him, setting the example by belabouring him herself with a cabbage stalk and calling him a Spanish rogue, and although in very brave array his garments were foully smeared with a sort of soft and very stinking mud, which abounds here at all seasons, so that the place better deserves to be called *Lorda* (filth) than *Londra*. Had not the don saved himself in a shop they would assuredly have torn his eyes out, so hateful are the airs assumed here by the Spanish, whom the people of England consider harpies[18]

In ages negotiating intense periods of cultural and economic strain, this desire to render the perceived outsider powerless has all too often been expressed through the will to police mental, physical, political borders. And, once again, Shakespeare and his contemporaries remained richly sensitive to the consequent crises of (in)hospitality and belonging which such situations provoked, as the anguish of Shakespeare's Coriolanus testifies: 'I would I were a Roman, for I cannot,/Being a Volsce, be that I am' (I.x.3-4). The angst-ridden affirmations in more recent times in defense of precious cultural environments and political ties of kinship may be aligned conceptually with what Gaston Bachelard proposed in the post-war period as the quest for '*felicitous space* […] [or] topophilia […] [which] determine[s] the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love […] eulogized space'.[19] Nonetheless, some three hundred and fifty years earlier, Edmund Bolton's dialogue *The elements of armories* (1610) had insisted that 'There is nothing infinite in the workes of Art, or Nature, but there must of necessity bee limits, termes, extremities, or bounds'.[20] The consequences of this drive to establish 'limits, termes, extremities, or bounds' is often witnessed as the brutal rescripting of living spaces in early modern writing. Such interventions in the early modern (and modern) political debate can be inextricably linked to the promotion of ethnic, religious, legal or mercantile principles of difference, for example, and frequently extend to verbal and psychological as well as physical tactics of control. Indeed, the forces of language and the body may become remarkably instrumental in the formulation and ownership of space outlined in early modern narratives.

In Book III of his *Arte of Englishe Poesie* (1589), for example, George Puttenham turned his reader's attentions to the trope of '*Antiphrasis* or the Broad floute': 'when we deride by plaine and flate contradiction'. Here, exploring the intricacies of rhetorical ornament, Puttenham also threw light on the radically imbalanced power relations which might characterise everyday lives in the congested Elizabethan capital: 'as he that saw a dwarfe go in

the streete said to his companion that walked with him: See yonder gyant: and to a Negro or woman blackemoore, in good sooth ye are a faire one, we may call it the broad floute'.[21] In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Puttenham's negotiation with explicitly gender-marked urban space is played out under equally compelling terms within the intimacy of a marriage. The initially secretive Brutus is upbraided angrily by Portia:

> Am I your self
> But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
> To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
> And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
> Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
> Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife. (II.i.282-7)

In such ways, again and again in early modern theatre there was often ample opportunity to interrogate limits, to chart the movement from geographies to bodies. In Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest Whore*, for example, we learn that 'A harlot is like *Dunkirke*, true to none,/Swallowes both English, Spanish, fulsome Dutch,/Blacke-doord Italian last of all the French' (vi.405-7). Configured thus, the female body was regularly claimed, aggressed, and fractionalised to indicate the very parameters and possibilities of social intercourse.

There were (and are), of course, all kinds of ways to inhabit and to render oneself remarkable within the confines of the city and the nation. The ancient Greeks had branded those incomprehensible aliens residing beyond the pale of the *polis* as βάρβαρος, *barbaros*, barbarian – interestingly, a word not identified in English usage before the sixteenth century. Acknowledging the influential legacies of such thinking in his considerations of aural, sonal boundaries in more recent times, the cultural theorist Dick Hebdige has highlighted how 'Subcultures [may be seen to] represent "noise" (as opposed to sound)'.[22] This point is

powerfully made at the close of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Here, as we witness the rites of submission to the Lancastrian crown, the audience is asked to attend most particularly to the physical *and verbal* translation of Katherine, princess of a conquered nation, to elite English society: Katherine – 'Your majesty shall mock at me. I cannot speak your England' (V.ii.102-3). From the outset of this history play, Shakespeare's Henry V is strategically committed to collapsing the distinctions between the roles of sovereign and warlord. However, he remains eager throughout to promote himself as defending a realm compromised by the ambitions of those on its political and geographical margins. The consolidation onstage of the realm's new frontiers rests in its final stages not upon the triumph of Henry's marital ambitions (predetermined by the shaming of France on the battlefield), but upon the linguistic (and mental) disciplining of his future spouse: 'Is it possible dat I sould love de *ennemi* of France?' (V.ii.158). With the benefit of hindsight, Katherine's responses may savour something of the rather plaintive sentiment expressed at the turn of our own, modern period by Georg Simmel: 'Our opposition makes us feel that we are not completely victims of our circumstances'.[23]

The Politics of Speaking and Belonging

The early modern concern with the linguistic and geographic grasp of a culture expressed itself in a myriad of contexts. As Europeans criss-crossed the continent with their various, pressing reasons for travel, they encountered not only religious, political, material limits and bounds, their journeyings simultaneously tested the very limits of language itself. On arriving in England, Giordano Bruno submitted in *La cena de le ceneri* (1584) that he dispensed with the learning of English during his residence in that kingdom 'because all gentlemen of any rank with whom he holds conversations can speak Latin, French, Spanish and Italian' and 'are aware that the English language is used only on this island and they would consider themselves barbarians if they knew no other tongue than their own'.[24] Similarly minded, the Antwerp

scholar Emmanuel van Meteren (1558-1612) contended that 'The English language is broken German (*de Enghelsche sprake is gebroken Duyts*), mixed with French and British terms, and words, and pronunciation, from which they have also gained a lighter pronunciation, not speaking out of the heart as the Germans, but only prattling with the tongue'.[25] Ultimately, such interventions could only serve to intensify the existing inferiority complexes expressed by the island natives relating not only to their powers of utterance but, equally importantly, to those of social exchange.

Anxieties surrounding the hierarchisation of language against language, language against dialect, continue to inform the politics of identity in contemporary debate. Indeed, framing collective belonging and recognition of Self in terms of reciprocated communication Jürgen Habermas argued notably in the post-war period that:

> everyday language is [...] the medium by which intersubjectivity of a shared world is maintained [...] The more the subject becomes individuated, the more he becomes entangled in a densely woven fabric of mutual recognition, that is, of reciprocal exposedness and vulnerability.[26]

Conversely, Shakespeare and his contemporaries can regularly transport us into environments where language itself is under severe pressure to construct this very possibility of intersubjectivity. We are introduced into the failed state of the boy Henry VI, for example, with laments for the dearly departed patriarch of Agincourt, Henry V: 'What should I say? his deeds exceed all speech' (*1 Henry VI*: I.i.15). In the final phase of the cycle the harried king protests increasingly unpersuasively: 'I prithee, give no limits to my tongue;/I am a king, and privileged to speak' (*3 Henry VI*: II.ii.119-20). In fact, we are thrust in such plays into a reality where perjured oaths, invective and declarations of provisional allegiance inform our understanding of this unravelling society: repeatedly, language gives place to the sword. In the modern period

Wittgenstein sought to qualify the epistemological reach of utterance, contending that 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world' (*Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt*).[27] However, over four hundred years earlier, in his *Art of Reason* (1573) Ralph Lever identified a rather different angle of vision in this enquiry into speaking and knowing: 'I see and confesse, that there be *Plura rerum, quam verborum genera*, (that is, moe things, then there are words to expresse things by)'.[28] Elsewhere in the period, language was groaning under quite other strains as the very concept of linguistic adequacy continued to be problematised. Abraham Fraunce, for example, lamented 'Woordes are lyke leaues […] leaues spring before Summer, and fall before Winter; and the same inconstancy is in words'.[29] Thus, in querying the stability of modes of communication and the grip of language at a culture's limits, the early modern age clearly did not restrict its enquiries into frontiers, boundaries, edges to the material, tangible realities of maps, plans or land ownership. It looked beyond in such matters to probe epistemological crises of interpretation. Across the Channel, Michel de Montaigne proffered his own characteristically barbed contributions to these pressing crises of communication. He submitted to the reader of his *Essais*:

> The world is nothing but chatter: I have never met a man who does not say more than he should rather than less […] We are all hollow and empty […] it is not with wind and spoken sounds that we have to fill ourselves: to restore ourselves we need a substance more solid.[30]

Mapping Bodies

While much scholarship has been justly devoted to early modern European disorientation at the prospect of an expanding globe across the length and breadth of the Atlantic and into the South China seas, the Old World was still left to cogitate the changeful production and

limitation of its own cultural and political spaces. Thomas Wright, for example, declared in *The Passions of the Minde* (1601)

> I haue diuers times weighed with my selfe, whence-from it should proceed, that Italians, and Spaniardes, with other inhabitants beyond the Alpes, should account Flemings, Englishmen, Scots, and other Nations dwelling on this side, simple, vncircumspect, vnwarie, easie to be deceiued and circumuented by them'.[31]

Twenty-first century audiences are constantly confronted with the figuring forth of national border controls, political limits, threatening mobilities - the ceaseless movement of individual subjects, as well as whole populations, in search of enhanced economic interest and/or well-being. However, the vehemence with which such questions are debated by publics *and counter-publics* in the present easily find their echo in the early modern age. When Walter Ralegh sought to impose deviant identities upon ex-centric peoples distant in time and space in *The History of the World* (1614), he returned to the thematic emphases of violence, crime, nomadism and flawed cultures of worship, familiar from the writings of his classical forebears, such as Herodotus, Strato and Pliny the Elder. In the anarchy of Homeric times, we are thus informed

> It is true that in these times Greece was very saluage, the inhabitants being often chaced from place to place, by the captaines of greater Tribes: and no man thinking the ground whereon hee dwelt his owne longer than he could hold it by strong hand […] briefly, Greece was then in her infancie.[32]

Equally importantly, urgent concerns engendered by the rootless, seemingly unimpeded by social obligations, controls, boundaries, had still not been quelled a generation later when

Thomas Fuller penned *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine and the confines thereof with the history of the Old and New Testament* (1650). Here, the reader learned that

> It is as difficult precisely to define the bounds, as impossible compleatly to describe the Countrey of *Midian.* For besides the mixture and conjunction (not to say confusion) of these eastern peoples, interfering amongst themselves in their habitations, the *Midianites* especially led erraticall lives, and therefore had uncertain limits. They dwelt most in tents, which we may call *moving towns,* and *extempore cities,* set up in a few houres, and in fewer taken down and dissolved. […] And if we wonder at the wildness of their wandring, and rudeness of their roving abroad, they will admire as much at the stilness of our station, and dulness of our constant dwelling in one place.[33]

Nearer to home, the Elizabethan authorities were expressing with equal vigour their concerns over nomadic communities (vagrants, actors, war veterans, criminals, political discontents) posing threats to the social order. However, on the stage in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* the protagonist Prospero finds himself a refugee amongst an increasing number of stage inhabitants who are forced to endure a similar plight. Seeking initially 'the bettering' of his mind, he had invested a political trust in his brother which, he declares, 'had indeed no limit,/A confidence sans bound'(I.ii.96-7) - and yet Duke Prospero is ousted and set adrift with his child. However, as the play unfolds, the audience is greeted with a proliferation of distances which need to be vaulted in order to remedy a world so out of joint: how can the seemingly drowned Ferdinand be restored to life? And then the next heir to the kingdom of Naples, Claribel ('Queen of Tunis'), is 'she that dwells/Ten leagues beyond man's life' in Africa. Sebastian concedes that ''twixt which regions/There is some space', but is forcefully reminded by Antonio that this is 'A space whose every cubit/Seems to cry out "How shall that Claribel/Measure us back to Naples?"' (I.ii.242-3, 253-5). Such concertina-ing of space in the production of the Familiar

and the Foreign lies at the heart of countless sixteenth- and seventeenth accounts of community-building.[34] Travellers, pilgrims, nomads, mercenaries, rebels, beggars, actors, seemingly masterless men and women… we are confronted again and again in early modern writing with the predicaments of this ever-growing mass of humanity. Indeed, such, it seems, was the age's obsession with itinerance and itinerants that Montaigne felt compelled to submit in his *Essais*, 'When people ask why I go on my travels I usually reply that I know what I am escaping from but not what I am looking for'.[35]

Nonetheless, it soon becomes apparent even on the briefest acquaintance with early modern documents that there was no need whatsoever to travel so extensively to encounter the perilous experience of transgressing boundaries. The cognitive mapping of gender performance across the social landscape, for example, invariably extended into the nooks and crannies of the familial household. The continental reformist Heinrich Bullinger affirmed for his mid sixteenth-century readers, 'What so euer is to be done wythout y^{e} house that belongeth to the man, & the woman to study for thynges wythein to be done'.[36] In such ways, the female body became itself a limit, a frontier which needed to be policed by the powers that be. The speaker in William Browne's pastoral *The Shepherd's Pipe* (1614), for example, pleads:

> Oh *Hobbinoll!* Canst thou imagine shee
> That hath so oft beene tryde, so oft misdone,
> Can from all other men bee true to thee?
> Thou knowst with mee, with *Cladon*, shee hath gone
> Beyond the limites that a maiden may.[37]

Pursuing a similar vein, Shakespeare's Othello resolves the female body primarily in terms of proprietorial lordship: 'I had rather be a toad/And live upon the vapour of a dungeon/Than keep a corner in the thing I love/for others' uses' (III.iii.274-7). Elsewhere, Leontes in *The Winter's*

Tale is even more marked in his territorial deployment of the female body, arguing that 'many a man […]/hold his wife by th'arm,/That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence/And his pond fished by his next neighbour, by/Sir Smile, his neighbour' (I.ii.193-7). In such narratives, we witness not only the enforcement of cultural priority through the imposition of unequal schemes of gender expectation, but how the body itself might become tangible proof of political allegiance or defection.

Controlling Foes

By way of conclusion to this discussion, having explored just some of the ways in which early modern writers probed and tested geographical, political, racial, gender, linguistic border controls, it seems timely to reflect finally upon the confines of time itself – past, present and the hereafter.

In the opening years of the Stuart century, Francis Bacon meditated the remit of Chronos himself in his *Temporis Partus Masculus* (1603-4): 'it is important to understand how the present is like a seer with two faces, one looking towards the future, the other towards the past'.[38] However, more generally, when this religiously-charged Age turned to the consideration of time, it was accompanied seemingly inevitably with a contemplation of faith and mortality. Adding its own voice to this vigorous debate, Thomas Wilson's *A Christian dictionarie* **(**1612) alerted the reader to the fact that 'Sinne is called Transgression, because it exceedes the boundes and markes which God by his Law hath appointed vnto vs, for the moderating of our desires and actions'**.[39]** Bounds, marks, lines clearly needed to be drawn and observed. The architect of the Elizabethan religious settlement, Richard Hooker, asserted fearlessly in *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (1594) that 'There must bee no communion nor fellowship with Papistes, neither in doctrine, ceremonies, nor gouernment'.[40]

In this welter of divisions and distinctions between faith communities which tore the early modern continent apart in unceasing warfare, it thus seems particularly valuable to be reminded of eirenic interventions such as that of Thomas Nashe in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594):

> O *Rome*, if thou hast in thee such soule-exalting obiects: what a thing is heauen in comparison of thée, of which *Mercators* globe is a perfecter modell than thou art? Yet this I must say to the shame of vs Protestants, if good workes may merit heauen, they doo them, we talke of them.[41]

Even in the midst of the furious polemics of Reformation and post-Reformation Europe there continued to be voices heard wishing to attentuate the age's insatiable appetite for cultural polarisation. As early as 1521 Erasmus had pleaded in his correspondence, 'If only this tragedy which Luther has begun with such bad omens for us might be given a happy ending by some god from the machine'.[42] If early modern Europe repeatedly sought out the resolution of border disputes on the battlefield, many humanist scholars across the continent remained unconvinced by the practice as a viable political *modus operandi*. A frequent visitor to Henry VIII's court, the Spanish scholar Juan Luis Vives penned a whole series of treatises, including *De Europae dissidiis, & bello turcico* (1526), *De concordia & discordia in humano genere* and its sequel *De pacificatione* (1529), *De conditione vitae Christianorum sub turca* (1529), expressing his disaffection with the bellicose times in which he found himself. Equally notably, Erasmus's own *De bello turcico* (1530) offered ample evidence of this contrary motion in early modern cultural debate. Indeed, as early as 1518 Erasmus was writing that 'In my own opinion it will be found a good plan, long before we make the attempt by force of arms, to seek to win [the Turks] by letters and by pamphlets'.[43]

Returning to more general questions of faith and human limitation, in meriting heaven there was, of course, a final frontier to cross and in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* Claudio admits to his sister his own fear of undertaking this ultimate mortal journey: 'to die, and go we know not where', to enter the 'thrilling region of thick-ribbèd ice' (III.i.118, 123). Earlier, Marlowe's foolhardy Faustus had been reminded by the sobering voice of Mephistopheles that 'Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd/In one selfe place, for where we are is hell' (*Doctor Faustus* II.i.118-9). In such ways, audiences were reminded in the theatre that bounds and limits may operate vertically as well as horizontally for (spiritual) border traffic and that, in such journeying, there is a bleeding through of one existential reality into another. The British Isles had been rendered famous in antiquity by the Roman epic poet Virgil in his first Eclogue as 'penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos' ('the Britons, wholly sundered from all the world').[44] More neglected, however, is the intervention of Procopius of Caesarea who had described in his *History of the Wars* how the bounds of the Tudor realm and its fellow island kingdoms had in the distant past become a definitive limit. In this later account, fishermen of yore ferried souls across the Channel to the island of Brittia: 'when they have reached the island and been relieved of their burden, they depart with all speed'.[45] It seems even in antiquity, the British Isles had long been known as a tipping point and in more senses than one.

As has become evident in this course of this discussion, Shakespeare and his contemporaries can and do accompany us closely on our urgent, sometimes desperate journeys towards margins, edges, borders, ends. They compel us all in the process to differentiate, discriminate, delineate which side of the limit we wish to find ourselves, exploring the ways in which we develop boundaries between Self and Other. Clearly, thorny crises in political decision-making and human imperative press down upon us now just as they did for populations at the turn the sixteenth century, as the writings of Shakespeare, Bacon, Nashe, Marlowe and so on bear fulsome witness. The present discussion has proposed that the

compulsive need to uncover the functions of, and appetites for, borders, limits, boundaries may constitute just one amongst many motives for turning back to the literary output of a culture dating back some four hundred years. The early modern age was wracked with a wide number of very particular divisions and sources of contention. However, its multifarious expressions of foreboding, anxiety and, elsewhere, of horror at the founding or erasing of schemes of access and exclusion can often speak remarkably to crises of interpretation and conduct being endured in more recent times.

By way of conclusion, it might also be added that the challenges thus presented to the readers and audiences of early modern writing may not be restricted to meditations upon our own political and individual limitations. As Montaigne advised in his *Essais*, we need to interrogate and problematise our wonted angles of vision before even embarking upon such enquiries:

> A straight oar seems bent in water. It is not only seeing which counts: how we see counts too.[46]

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NOTES

[1] All references to Shakespearean texts are taken from Stephen Greenblatt et al (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2016). This research was first presented at the 2019 conference of the European Shakespeare Research Association at the University of Roma Tre. I would like to extend my thanks to the organizers, Maria del Sapio Garbero and Maddalena Pennacchia, for their kind invitation to that conference and to the many delegates who communicated their responses to me on that occasion.

[2] In this context, see, for example, the following studies exploring this enquiry with regard to Shakespearean texts in very different fields: Jonathan P. A. Sell, 'Shakespeare's Sea and the Frontier of Knowledge', *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900* 59.2 (Spring 2019), 393-414; Daniel Juan Gil, 'At the limits of the social world: Fear and pride in *Troilus and Cressida*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52.3 (Fall 2001), 336-359; Concetta Gullota, 'The experience of limits and the broadening of the horizons of consciousness', *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 48.5 (November 2003), 629-642.

[3] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 1.
[4] Stephen Gosson, *The schoole of Abuse* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1579), pp. 25-6.
[5] For further discussion of the topographies of *King Lear*, see, for example: Francis Barker, *The Culture of Violence: Essays on Tragedy and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 3-31; John Gillies, *Shakespeare and Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 40-47; Bruce Avery, 'Gelded Continents and Plenteous Rivers: Cartography as Rhetoric in Shakespeare', in John Gillies and Virginia Mason Vaughan (eds.), *Playing the Globe: Genre and Geography in English Renaissance Drama* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1998), pp. 46-62; Werner Brönnimann, 'Thickets and Beaches: Evoking Place in the Stories of *King Lear*', in Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen (eds.), *Shakespeare and Space. Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), pp. 59-78; Stuart Elden, *Shakespearean Territories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), pp. 15-24;
[6] Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London: S. Stafford & R. Read for Edmund Mattes, 1600-1601), 118^{v}.
[7] Baldassare Castiglione, *The courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (London: William Seres, 1561), PP2^{r}.
[8] Henry Crosse, *Vertues common-wealth* (London: Thomas Creede, 1603), P4^{v}-Q1^{r}.
[9] See Francis Bacon, 'Of the Vicissitude of Things', in *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: World's Classics, 2002), p. 454.
[10] Sir Walter Ralegh, *The History of the World* (London: Walter Burre, 1617 [1614]): bk.1, ch.2, sect. 3, p. 28.
[11] See Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici, Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus*, ed. R. H. A. Robbins (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982): *Religio Medici*, Sect 17, p. 19.
[12] James Howell, *A German diet, or, The ballance of Europe* (London: Humphry Moseley, 1653), pp. 53-4.
[13] Qtd. in Bruce R. Galloway & Brian P. Levack (eds.), *The Jacobean Union: Six Tracts of 1604* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society/Clark Constable, 1985), pp. xi-xii.
[14] See David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 57ff.
[15] See Keith M. Brown, 'The vanishing emperor: British kingship and its decline, 1603-1707', in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *Scots and Britons. Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 58-90 (p. 79).
[16] Francis Bacon, *The remaines of the Right Honorable Francis, Lord Verulam, Viscount of St. Albanes* (London: B. Alsop, 1648), p. 65.
[17] Thomas Middleton, *Michaelmas terme* (London: Thomas Purfoot & Edward Allde, 1607), C3^{r}, G4^{r}.
[18] 1617 Venetian Ambassador's (Orazio Busino's) report to the Council at Venice*: Calendar of State Papers*, vol. xv, ed. Allen B. Hinds (London, 1909), 103a (pp. 58-63).
[19] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994), p. xxxv.
[20] Edmund Bolton, *The elements of armories* (London: George Eld, 1610), p. 86.
[21] George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie* (Lonndon: Richard Field, 1589), p. 159.
[22] Dick Hebdige, 'Subculture: The Meaning of Style' (1979), anthologized in Raiford Guins & Omayra Zaragoza Cruz (eds). *Popular Culture. A Reader* (London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage, 2005), pp. 355-71 (p. 355).
[23] Georg Simmel, 'Conflict' and 'The Web of Group-Affiliations', trans. respectively Kurt H. Wolff & Reinhard Bendix (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1955), pp. 18-9.
[24] Translated in Frances A. Yates, *Renaissance and Reform: The Italian Contribution. Collected Essays* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983): II.165-6 Giordano Bruno's *La cena de le ceneri* (1584) is a dialogue between Smitho and Teophilo Philosopho on the need for Bruno to speak English:
SMI – Che vuol dire ch'ha si poco pensiero d'intendere nostra lingua?
THE – Non è cosa che lo costringa, o che l'inclini a questo, perche coloro che son honorati et gentil huomini co li quali lui suol conversare; tutti san parlare o'Latino, o'Francese, o'Spagnolo, o'Italiano: i quali sapendo che la lingua Inglesa non viene in uso se non dentro a quest'isola, sé stimarebbono saluatici, non sapendo altra lingua che la propria naturale.
See Giordano Bruno *Opere italiane. Ristampa anastatica delle cinquecentine*, vol. II, ed. E. Canone (Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1999), p. 385.
[25] William Brenchley Rye (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners in the days of Elizabeth and James the First, comprising translations of the journals of the two Dukes of Wirtemberg in 1592 and 1610; Both illustrative of Shakespeare* (London: John Russell Smith, 1865), p. 71.
[26] Jürgen Habermas, *The Habermas Reader*, ed. William Outhwaite (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 196.
[27] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), p. 89 (5.62).
[28] Ralph Lever, *The Arte of Reason, rightly termed, Witcraft, teaching a pefect way to argue and dispute* (London, 1573), ¶4^{v}.
[29] Abraham Fraunce, *The Lawier's Logike* (London: William How, 1588), ¶¶2^{r}.
[30] From 'On educating children' (I.xxvi) and 'On glory' (II.xvi). See Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 189, 702, 703.

[31] Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde* (London: Valentine Sims, 1601), A2[r].
[32] Sir Walter Ralegh, *The History of the World* (London: Walter Burre, 1634 [1614]): 2.13.7.435.
[33] Thomas Fuller, *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine and the confines thereof with the history of the Old and New Testament* (London: J. F. for John Williams, 1650), CCC2[v].
[34] For further discussion here, see Andrew Hiscock, '"Cut my heart in sums": Community-making and –breaking in the prodigal drama of Thomas Middleton', in R. D. Sell, A. W. Johnson & H. Wilcox (eds.), *Community-Making in Early Stuart Theatres* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 311-337.
[35] From 'On vanity' (III.ix). See Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, p. 1100.
[36] See Heinrich Bullinger, *The golden boke of christen matrimonye moost necessary [and] profitable for all the[m], that tentend to liue quietly and godlye in the Christen state of holy wedlock* (1542), L3[r]-L3[v]. For further discussion here of gendered space and its limits in a Shakespearean context, see, for example: Miriam Kammer, 'Breaking the Bounds of Domesticity: Ecofeminism and Nature Space in *Love's Labour's Lost*', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 36.3 (Fall 2018), 467-483.
[37] William Browne, *The shepheards pipe* (London: Nicholas Oakes for John Norton, 1614), F1[r]-F2[v].
[38] See translation from the *Temporis Partus Masculus* (1602–3), in Benjamin Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), p. 68.
[39] Thomas Wilson, *A Christian dictionarie* (London: William Jaggard, 1612), p. 492.
[40] Richard Hooker, *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (London, John Windet, 1604), p. 172.
[41] Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (London: T. Scarlet for C. Burby, 1594), K1[r]-K2[v].
[42] Erasmus, 'The correspondence of Erasmus, letters 1122 to 1251 (1520–1521)', in Erasmus, *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 8, trans. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thomson (Toronto, ON, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 258.
[43] To Paul Volz, Basel 14 August 1518. See Erasmus, *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. VI: 'The Correspondence of Erasmus – Letters 842 to 992 (1518-1519)', trans. R. A. B. Mynors & D. F. S. Thomson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 77.
[44] See Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, Eng trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, revised G. P. Goold (Cambridge MA/London: Harvard University Press – Loeb Classical Library, 1999), pp. 28-29.
[45] Procopius, *The History of the Wars*, vol. 5: bks. 7.36 - 8, trans. H. B. Dewing (Cambridge MA./London: Harvard University Press – Loeb Classical Library, 1928), p. 269 (VIII.xx). For further discussion here, see Lisa Hopkins, *Renaissance Drama on the Edge* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 115.
[46] From 'The taste of good and evil things depends in large part on the opinion we have of them' (I.xiv). See Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, p. 71.